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tions of America, England, France, Germany and Belgium will probably lead to closer alliance for mutual service, an alliance which may supersede political treaties and may be more effective for International friendship than the leagues of potentates and the resolutions of parliaments.

JOHN MARTIN.

NEW YORK.

THE CONVERSION OF ST. AUGUSTINE.

IT is a singular fact that no humanist writer of recent years has been tempted to give us a psychological and ethical study of St. Augustine. The great bishop of Hippo appeals to all time, not only as a commanding and interesting personality, but as one who lived at a notable crisis in the intellectual, religious, and political development of Europe, and who sprang forward with alacrity to meet every movement of his day. In this there is obvious promise of deep human interest; yet the life of the Afro-Roman bishop has been entirely abandoned to writers who sacrifice both psychology and ethics to the requirements of a narrow theology. There are capable studies of his intellectual side—Reuter's "Augustinische Studien," Grandgeorge's "S. Augustin," and especially Nourisson's "Philosophie de S. Augustin,"—but these partial inquiries only suggest, particularly where they deal with ethical opinions, the larger interest of the complete study. Germany has only given us biographies of the usual perverse ecclesiastical type, the chief of which are the works of Bindemann and Cardinal Von Rauscher. The principal French life is from the pen of a layman, M. Poujoulat; but it is a work that seems eager to redeem the laity of the writer by a surcharge of the conventional psychology of a saint. In England the only work of use in any direction is written by an Irish priest. All these works are constructed on the same perverse *à priori* form. Up to the time of his conversion Augustine must be portrayed in uniformly dark colors. Then, of a sudden and with utter contempt of all the laws of the psychologist, the flood-gates of light and

grace are opened, and every line must henceforth be written in letters of gold.

Now, this kind of work may seem to lend a sort of empirical confirmation to certain dogmas, but it has spread an entirely false impression of that most notable event in a notable life, the conversion of Saint Augustine. It is true that Augustine himself is primarily responsible for the misfortune. The hagiographers only reproduce the theory of the "Confessions." In this autobiography Augustine is feverishly anxious to envelop the whole of his youth and early manhood in one dark mantle of sin. He cannot even grant his infancy the conventional innocence. The shadow of future crime is painfully and laboriously traced in his boyhood. The notorious connection of his youth is touched in lurid phrases; and his conversion is described with a seductive eloquence. Readers are apt to forget that the book was written nearly fifteen years after his conversion. It is expressly a theological or didactic work, in which the Bishop of Hippo Regius and light of the Western Church holds up to the Christian world, as an awful example of nature without grace, the rhetorician of Thagaste. The ground of his earlier years is now covered in the light of a refulgent ideal, in which even the stealing of a few pears casts an appalling shadow. That is very well for the theologian; but the humanist would rather have the outer life given in conjunction with the inner life that accompanied it, and judged by the ideal which was present at each step. For instance, more than twenty years after his conversion we find a Donatist bishop of character and repute, and a friend of Augustine's, gravely chiding him for his moral deterioration since the days when they were school-fellows together at Carthage—the very lowest depth of Augustine's career in the usual hagiographer! We may hold lightly the censures of Bayle and Gibbon, but here is one of many prominent indications that the autobiographer and those who have taken their inspiration from him have deceived us. A careful study of Augustine's conversion will make the point clearer and disclose what a vast amount of moral interest is hidden behind the mechanical structures of the hagiographers.

In the first place, then, it is entirely wrong to suppose that the well-known struggle which preceded Augustine's return to the church was a struggle with sin. Readers of the "Confessions" will remember how Augustine had been intellectually prepared for admission to the church. He had some years before discarded the heresy of his youth, Manicheism, alleging—as impulsive young men allege to-day—scientific difficulties and suspicion of hierarchic disorders. But two broad obstacles lay between him and Christianity; he could not conceive anything spiritual, and could not embrace the crude stories of the Old Testament. Ambrose of Milan removed the latter difficulty by showing, in his sermons, that the Old Testament need not be taken literally. Ambrose was incompetent to remove the philosophic obstacle—it was probably well for Augustine that he had not time to attempt it,—but a lucky introduction to some newly translated Neo-Platonic works helped him over it. It seems probable that it was the "Enneads" of Plotinus that Augustine read at this time; at all events Grandgeorge and Nourisson trace most of his "Platonic" ideas to Plotinus and Porphyry. There he was initiated into the Platonist idea-world, the world of spiritual and immutable yet thrilling realities—truth, virtue, beauty, etc. The last intellectual gulf was crossed and he now turned to St. Paul with entire faith and submission of mind. Then began the profound moral struggle that culminated in the famous garden scene.

In order to understand fully the falseness of the ordinary view of this struggle, it is necessary to appreciate Augustine's character better in the earlier years. This may be done from the "Confessions" themselves, read with that discretion which the circumstances of their appearance recommend. The general determination to paint everything as darkly as possible is apparent, but passages occur which weaken the impression for the thoughtful reader. Thus in describing what we may call his college-life at Carthage he unconsciously presents himself as much superior to his fellows. He describes a group who resemble the "Mohawks" of old London (the *eversores*), and says how he shrank from their company. He tells that he would not join even in the lesser disorders which were general

—boisterously disturbing the classes, and so on. In fact he makes the curious admission that he had to lie and invent in order not to seem too different from his companions in morals. All this is fully confirmed by the Donatist bishop, Vincent, whom I mentioned. He declares that at Carthage Augustine was considered “a quiet and respectable youth.” On one occasion a kind of private haruspex offered to discover what his chances were of winning the crown at the theatre by his oration. “If the crown were made of imperishable gold,” he replied, “I would not have a single fly killed to procure it for me.” That is not the language of a licentious youth. There is, of course, the notorious fact of his unmarried connection. I cannot here enter into the morals, Christian and Pagan, of the fourth century, but the briefest inquiry will make it clear that even a Christian youth, if unbaptized, would take a mistress in those days without a suggestion of moral compunction. The letters of Jerome, the sermons of Augustine, and the work of Salvianus, fully establish this. An interesting poem of a pious and penitent elderly Christian of the time—the “Eucharisticos” of Paulinus of Pella—presents the prevailing sentiment very clearly, and practically gives it the sanction of age and piety.

“Carumque memor servare pudorem
Cedere et ingenuis oblatis sponte caverem,
Contentus domus ill ecebris famulantibus uti.”

Augustine’s faithfulness to his companion for fourteen years implies, in that age, a rare moderation of character.

However, the mother of Adeodatus was discharged in 385. Augustine had resolved to marry, but the young lady his mother had chosen—for her dowry, one regrets to find—was only in her tenth year, and the marriage was postponed for two years. This change had been proposed, it must be noted, not for ethical reasons but on social and financial grounds; it is the episode of Augustine’s career where a merely human feeling is most indignant with him. It is quite true that Augustine had sought another companion for the intervening period, but he had now embraced the idea of matrimony. It would be preposterous to suppose that the storm which swept

his soul in the summer of 386 sprang from the idea of waiting a year for his marriage, or that other nuptial arrangements could not have been made if he were of so frail a temper. One can see clearly enough, not only in the facts of his life at that time, but in his express words in the "Confessions," that it was not the abandonment of sin, but the sacrifice for life of all love, even consecrated, that stirred the roots of his soul.

The real explanation of the conversion of Augustine, the profound conflict, carries us beyond the personal question, and into the very heart of early Christian ethics. The hagiographer, who is generally a theologian, has good reason to shrink from too close an inquiry into the episode, for it discloses a most unhappy condition of the best Christian thought of the time. It is frequently advanced that the ideal of entire continence was the most fitting one to set up in so corrupt an age. Writers who affirm this are usually found to have a disproportionate idea of the vice and virtue of the time. Even if we take the two chief censors of the second half of the fourth century, Ammianus and St. Jerome—and one might as well depict modern France exclusively on the witness of Nordau and Zola—we do not find a situation worse than that of England under the Georges, as Mr. S. Dill says in his admirable study of the fifth century. M. Gaston Boissier, another careful student of Roman life, says the period "recalls the age of Trojan and Antonine." Ecclesiastical writers rarely do justice to the fine group of patricians who clustered round the figures of Praetextatus and Symmachus. We may trust that the sentiments attributed to them in the "Saturnalia" of Macrobius, confirmed as they are by the letters of Symmachus, are genuine; and in these we have a fine yet sober ideal of conduct proving as effective as it does in any other age. However that may be, all the Christian leaders of the time insisted on the ideal of continence as the test of a sincere and generous acceptance of Christianity. St. Ambrose wrote in ardent praise of virginity, promising the worldly wise that God would increase the fertility of their matrons in compensation. St. Jerome poured his characteristic scorn on marriage; "it is all very well," he says in one of his letters, "for those who are afraid

to sleep alone at night." The Greek fathers were no less insistent. All were violently opposed to second marriage, and in various other ways found an element of repulsion, if not sin, in all carnal conjunction.

The Epistles of St. Paul were the natural source of this sentiment, and it was to these Epistles that Augustine turned when Plotinus had conjured away his intellectual difficulties. Augustine saw at once, what the modern divine generally refuses to see, that Paul made carnal abstinence the test of real discipleship. Marriage was a concession to the weak, a little less ungraciously conceded than it was by Jerome. Augustine looked into the Church, he says, and found that "one went this way and one that." But the Pauline theory of a Christian life was unmistakable. The way of the strong and the generous was the way of mortification, especially in the matter of love. Augustine was one of the strong. The earlier worldly ambition, lit up by his study of the "*Hortensius*," had been converted into an even stronger spiritual ambition. He wanted no concessions, to escape "burning" or the fear of sleeping alone. He felt that Christ was asking him to sacrifice every pleasure and interest that was purely of this world. The desire of wealth he had given up in the philosophic fervour kindled by the "*Hortensius*," but had recovered in the quasi-Epicurean (for he had very hazy notions of Epicurus, and all the other Greeks) period of his early days at Milan. He now abandoned it once more without difficulty; the curious passage in which he accuses himself even later of a tendency to excess at table, and on which Bayle has enlarged with no small delight, cannot be taken seriously. But he was grievously tormented by the prospect of sacrificing love. Everyone knows the beautiful passage in which, fourteen years afterwards, he tells how the recollections of his joy "plucked his fleshly garments, and asked: 'Dost thou cast us off for ever?'" The beauty and force of the passage are entirely lost by those who would have him refer merely to the dismissal of his unlawful companion of the year. It was the unhappy stress which the Christian ethics of the time laid on the sacrifice of love as a test of fervent discipleship that caused the pro-

longed struggle. Then came the narrative of Simplicianus, from whom he learned that frail women and unlettered men were daily taking the step from which he shrank as something heroic. After one last and memorable conflict with his old self he leaped the abyss of pain, and was converted.

That is the true story of Augustine's moral development, as it is told in the "Confessions" and in passages of his other works. We have to follow an orderly and an interesting growth, instead of being forced to accept a theory of moral chaos which is supernaturally brought to order by a flash of the spirit. The conversion was not a conversion at all in the ethical meaning of that word—it was not a conversion from sin. It is obvious there would have been no struggle at all if the matrimonial arrangement had not fallen under the ban. Réville has observed that "most of the religions which have given a large place to morality have foundered on the rock of asceticism." Here, at all events, we have an instructive illustration of the effect of the ascetic ideal in early Christianity.

It may be asked whether the struggle, perverse though it may have been from the point of view of a theoretical ethic, was not wholly justified in the power it lent to Augustine in after years. I have neither space nor occasion here to enter in any detail into Augustine's later career, but there is one page of it that is rarely written, and that it may be useful to consider in connection with his conversion. I am thinking of the group of short treatises in which he deals with questions of love and matrimony. It is well known that he held views on these questions which even the modern divine regards as perverse, but few imagine to what lengths his logical faculty compelled him to go. Brucker, premising a half defiant and half apologetic remark to the effect that "a spade should be called a spade," observes (in his "Critical History,") that "the whole moral philosophy of the fathers was rather weak," and that "Augustine does not take his place in the front rank of philosophers." Certainly the views which Augustine advances in these works, and which were more or less shared by Ambrose and Jerome, exhibit the principles of the early Christian ethics in a pitiable light. As to woman herself,

Augustine soon became almost contemptuous. One of the first and sternest rules of his monastery and seminary—and a very necessary one—was to exclude even his own sister most rigorously. The reaction deepens with his years. After a time we find him writing to a young man, who hesitates to quit the world on account of his mother: "We have to beware of Eve in every woman, no matter who she is." That painfully recalls Jerome's advice to Heliodorus to thrust his mother aside "if she loose her hair and bare the breasts he has sucked" to keep him at home; though Jerome modified his feeling after his sojourn at Rome, and lived for years in constant and tender intercourse with women. In his later sermons and writings, Augustine is frankly contemptuous of woman. When he asks, in his commentary on Genesis, why she was created at all, his fertile imagination can think of nothing but procreation. He does not even show the least disposition to welcome the increasing worship of the mother of Christ. The sermons quoted on her festivals in the Roman breviary, and attributed to him, are undisputed forgeries.

But when we come to examine the treatises on sex-questions of his episcopal years, we find some remarkable opinions. The root-idea of his whole philosophy is, of course, that there is something unhallowed in the very essence of sexual feeling and, especially of sexual intercourse. The most direct and obvious consequence of this was a high estimate of physical integrity, and Augustine wrote a glowing eulogy of it in a small work "On Continence" soon after his conversion (or about 395). Five or six years later he was concerned to hear of the success of the monk Jovinian in attacking the cult of virginity, and he defended and developed the ascetic view in two works, "On holy virginity" and "On conjugal love." It is in the latter work that he advanced his most singular opinions. Matrimony being a divine institution, Augustine has to seek in it the element which consecrates or legitimizes the sexual indulgence it implies. This he finds in procreation; though in one place he timidly adds its utility in removing the stress of temptation. Naturally, there are strange corollaries to so narrow and forbidding a view of wedded love. In the

first place the accompanying pleasure is unholy, and must not be desired or enjoyed in itself. Then, those who cannot be persuaded to abstain from matrimony altogether, should be exhorted to be continent in matrimony; and all men and women should be warned to abstain on holy festivals. It is always the same unhappy idea of an inherent evil. His next step is somewhat amusing. It occurs to him that his theory now enables him to answer the gibes of Manichees about the extensive families of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Since procreation was the essential matter, and the human race called for rapid increase in those early days, the conduct of the patriarchs was clearly moral and commendable; "they acted from a sense of duty, not a feeling of lust," he says. On the other hand, continence is more commendable in his own day; for Augustine, though he never explicitly grants it, vaguely shares the general apprehension that the end of the world approaches. There are modern Christian nations which call for increase of population as urgently as the patriarchal age. And Augustine is actually driven to admit a similar conclusion from his principles in another way. If procreation is the essential aim, and a man's wife is proved to be barren, how can you forbid him to have a mistress in addition for the purpose of rearing children? Augustine confesses that he cannot forbid him, if the wife consents; "it was lawful to the patriarchs; whether it is lawful now or no I should not like to say." Such is the peculiar and awful penalty of logically applying the ascetic Christian view of marriage. Nor does Augustine improve his position much when he considers the converse hypothesis of the man proving sterile. He will not allow the wife a paramour, because "it is in the nature of things for there to be only one lord and master." He is only saved from disaster by his contempt of women. He has no idea of her equal worth and dignity. Fortunately, in the end, when he is confronted with a pagan application of his principles—the case of Cato—he throws logic to the winds and says: "In our marriages the sanctity of the sacrament is of greater moment than the fruitfulness of the womb." But of the human

holiness and beauty of marriage, of the sacrament of love, this light of many ages has no conception.

There are three other works in which he develops the same principles. In the treatise "On the blessedness of widowhood," he strongly urges widows to take a vow of continence, —declares that a breach of this vow by remarrying would be worse than adultery. It is obvious enough what practical conclusions would be drawn from this principle in that age of widows. Five years afterwards he published a work "On adulterous marriages." The marriages he has in mind are chiefly the unions of divorced people, which he sternly denounces. But he incidentally enunciates a theory which is largely reversed in our day. He says that men are more culpable for this infidelity than women. Why? "Because they are men," he bluntly replies, with his customary depreciation of women. Finally, in the treatise "On marriage and concupiscence," he explicitly describes sexual feeling as an unmitigated evil, born of original sin, and quite accidental to marriage.

The last-mentioned work was written during the controversy with Pelagius, but all the others were written before that amiable heresiarch disturbed Augustine's views with his sturdy defence of human nature. The dogma of original sin, gradually developed in the stress of the controversy, came to complete his unfortunate ethical theory. But even before he began to bewail the primeval corruption of human nature his anthropological view was vitiated by the prevailing doctrine of sex-relation. For Augustine and his contemporaries, St. Paul was the starting point of this doctrine, and it is entirely beside my purpose to trace it beyond him. But the conversion of Augustine and his subsequent development illustrate very vividly the prejudicial character of that moral aberration of a great church.

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